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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002408

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DEFENSE SECRETARY RESIGNS, REPLACED BY NATIONAL
SECURITY ADVISOR GONZALEZ

REF: MANILA 1988 (RULING COALITION SELECTS SECDEF
TEODORO)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On November 16, Secretary of National Defense Teodoro resigned in order to focus on his campaign for President. Norberto "Bert" Gonzalez will serve as Acting Secretary until the presidential transition in June 2010, and is likely to continue to serve concurrently in his current position as National Security Advisor. Gonzalez is a*xz-QDs run for President in the May 2010 election. Teodoro had been selected as the ruling Lakas-Kampi-CMD party's candidate in September (Reftel).

[1](#)3. (U) President Arroyo named Norberto "Bert" Gonzalez to serve as Acting SND until the newly-elected President takes office in June 2010. A Palace spokesman said that, "There are many reforms being undertaken for the Armed Forces since the President assumed office. The President expects that (Gonzalez) will continue to implement those reforms within the Armed Forces and the different civilian agencies of the Department of National Defense."

[1](#)4. (U) Gonzalez, who also served as Officer-in-Charge of the Department of National Defense for approximately one month in July-August 2007, is likely to continue to serve concurrently in his current position as National Security Advisor. He has previously served as Presidential Chief of Staff (2004-2005) and Presidential Advisor for Special Concerns (2001-2004). For additional biographic information, please see para. 10.

Reactions to Gonzalez Appointment

[1](#)5. (C) Reactions to Gonzalez's appointment have been mixed. In March 2009, Gonzalez drew heavy criticism when he proposed that a transitional government be formed to carry out constitutional changes, with membership drawn from the executive branch, judiciary, churches, and civil society. He suggested that this government be headed by former President Joseph Estrada, who was forced out of the presidential palace in a 2001 uprising and then convicted on corruption charges, or Mike Velarde, the leader of the Catholic Charismatic group El Shaddai Movement.

[1](#)6. (C) While President Arroyo quickly distanced herself from Gonzalez's statements, the National Security Advisor's comments were seized on by critics as evidence that President Arroyo might seek to remain in office beyond 2010. While Arroyo has publicly reaffirmed her support for the 2010 elections, many Filipinos have suspected that she wants to extend her term or otherwise remain in power by revising the Constitution. (Any attempts to change the Constitution would face heavy Senate and public resistance.) On November 16, Gonzalez sought to downplay his past remarks on a transitional government, saying that he had merely intended to initiate "meaningful debate in our society" and that he had "wanted the people to go back in history and look in on the more sensitive and critical aspects of people power."

[1](#)7. (U) Senator Rodolfo Biazon, Chairman of the Committee on National Defense and Security, was critical of Gonzalez's appointment. Referring to Gonzalez's proposal for a transitional government, Biazon told the press, "I think he should be recalled (from his new position) because his advocacies are dangerous to the constitutional government.... We have to relate this (appointment) to the 'no election' scenario because (that scenario) can justify that so-called transitional government, and here the advocate of those revolutionary ideas is given the power to oversee and control the Armed Forces of the Philippines."

Comment

18. (C) As National Security Advisor, Gonzalez has focused on the New People's Army's communist insurgency, letting other officials concentrate on the Muslim insurgency and terrorism in the South. While his term as SND will be fairly brief, it has the potential to be problematic. In the past we have

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found Gonzalez to be inconsistent and prone to shooting from the hip.

19. (C) In contrast to the Palace spokesman's statement that Gonzalez will continue reforms in the Armed Forces, we believe that he will not be an active Acting Secretary and that any attempt to make major departures from current policy would not be supported by the Department's senior managers. We expect that, during the interim period, the official most responsible for running the Department will be Antonio C. Santos, Jr., Undersecretary for Defense Affairs and Office-in-Charge for Plans and Programs. Given our countries' large and complex defense relationship, it would certainly be helpful if the mercurial Gonzalez does indeed take a back seat.

Biography

10. (U) Norberto "Bert" Gonzales Jr. was born on April 17, 1947 in Balanga, Bataan Province, Philippines. He holds university degrees from Ateneo de Davao (pre-medical) and the University of the Philippines (Masters in Chemistry). From 1971 until 2004, he was Chairman of the Philippine Democratic Socialist Party. He served as Presidential Adviser for Special Concerns from 2001-2004, then became President Arroyo's Chief of Staff for a year, before becoming National Security Advisor. He served as Officer-in-Charge of the Department of National Defense in July-August 2007.

KENNEY